ATLI PARTNERS WITH KINESIOLOGY’S ABILITIES UNLIMITED CAMP

Story by Jessica Harris and Betty Schiffer

Abilities Unlimited is a 3 week collaborative project hosted by Auburn University’s School of Kinesiology, in partnership with the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling and the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI). Camp participants included individuals with and without developmental disabilities ranging from 5-22 years of age. The goal of the Abilities Unlimited Camp was to build motor competence and confidence, as well as social, cognitive, and life skills in those with disabilities.

ATLI was tasked with incorporating transition activities into the daily curriculum for those campers with disabilities. While all campers had the opportunity to participate in bike riding, swimming, academics, and fine motor activities, those campers with disabilities, ages 13-22, had a specially designed transition program incorporated into their daily routine.

Graduate assistants at ATLI developed and implemented lessons tailored toward students’ most significant areas of need (e.g., goal-setting, hygiene, social skills, and job preparation activities). Lessons were created to address areas of need, while also incorporating fun activities like using technology while singing and dancing. The focus of these lessons was to promote self-determination and self-advocacy skills. The students also gained skills to assist them in obtaining a job after high school. Additionally, camp participants engaged in recreation and leisure activities such as learning about gardening, exercising, and participating in the occasional dance party.

ATLI’s participation in the Abilities Unlimited Camp not only impacted students with disabilities, but also influenced young professionals in the field of special education and kinesiology as to how teaching transition skills can be embedded in multiple aspects of a student’s day.

For more information about the Abilities Unlimited Camp and registration for summer 2017, visit http://www.auburn.edu/outreach/opce/auburnyouthprograms/abilitiesunlimited.htm.
TAKE 5 WITH...
CHAD EVANS & GEORGE HALL
Auburn Transition Leadership Institute
Stories by Leah Kartovicky

ATLI INTRODUCES NEW RESEARCH COORDINATOR, CHAD EVANS

Tell us about your educational background. I graduated in 2004 from Auburn University’s College of Math and Science with a bachelor’s degree in biomedical sciences. I then gained over ten years in healthcare experience. In 2015, I earned my master’s degree in administration of higher education also from Auburn University.

What brought you to the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI)? I was really impressed with the professionalism of the ATLI staff. They are very knowledgeable, hardworking and talented. Beyond that, the staff is very personable and friendly too. I am also impressed with the type of work that goes on at ATLI. Working at ATLI feels as though you are making a positive impact in the world.

How do you feel ATLI will assist in preparing you for your future plans and goals? At ATLI, diverse projects are being worked on that allow for the collaboration of state leaders, local leaders, and students. This collaboration allows for great minds and a variety of talents to come together to improve upon the services in the state. By having opportunity to collaborate on the various projects at ATLI, I will gain new perspectives and skills that will assist me in all of my future endeavors.

What are you most excited for in your new position as research coordinator? I am most looking forward for the opportunity to present at the Alabama Transition Conference. As the research coordinator, I will present the findings from data that is collected by ATLI. However, I am more excited to share ways to improve transition services throughout the state by using the data that is collected to assist in improving data-based decisions. By using the findings from the data to improve services, I believe that I will be able to assist in making the greatest impact on services across the state.

CELEBRATING 15 YEARS OF SERVICE WITH ATLI...

The ATLI staff wishes to recognize Mr. George S. Hall for his years of service as we have collectively worked to improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities in Alabama. He has contributed to a number of projects that have positively impacted transition services for young children and youth with disabilities in our state.

Your dedication and contributions are greatly appreciated and you will be missed. We wish you the best in your retirement years!
Congratulations to Dr. Caroline “Cari” Dunn! We are very proud to announce that one of our most engaged professional supporters, Cari Dunn of the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling, was awarded the Humana-Germany-Sherman Distinguished Professorship in January 2015. The title Distinguished University Professor recognizes Auburn University’s most outstanding faculty who have adhered to standards of continuous high performance. As one reviews Cari’s curriculum vitae, it is understandable why she was chosen for the Distinguished Professorship Award. “We have several professorships in the College of Education,” she stated. “Some of them are targeted toward certain activities. This particular one looks at the contributions [the recipient] has had across different areas during his or her career.”

Cari has been at Auburn since 1991. She earned her master’s and doctorate degrees in special education at the University of Texas. She met her husband here at Auburn; they have one daughter who is now preparing to transition to college.

Over the years, she has served as program coordinator, project director, graduate program officer, lead faculty, and professor. As she completed her education, Cari also served in various roles in special education, preparing herself for her future career success. When asked what it was — after so much time — that held her interest in the field; she did not hesitate in answering with tremendous enthusiasm, “Preparing secondary teachers! When I reflect on my own preparation [in college], there were not a lot of differentiated programs focusing on older students; it was more of a developmental approach. The needs of secondary students are very different from those of elementary students. I am excited to see the level of commitment that our students [in the special education program] have; their desire to make things better. You can tell that it is really a passion for them,” she added. “A strength of our program is that we get them out a lot — they do internships and practicums and programs like Best Buddies.”

Best Buddies is a non-profit organization helping to enrich the lives of those with intellectual disabilities. Students are matched with a ‘buddy’ and participate in social events together to allow their friendships to grow. Auburn’s chapter has been recognized as one of the most outstanding chapters several times. Cari said, “the Best Buddies community reminds her of the theme song from Cheers, ‘Where everybody knows your name, and they’re always glad you came...You wanna go where people know, people are all the same...’ ”

The focus on transition is key, Cari says. “As a teacher, you must be prepared to first know your student — their characteristics and developmental needs, and secondly, you must realize the next environments that they are going into and how to prepare them for that.” She continued, “Many students, especially those with higher incidence disabilities, are at great risk of dropping out, so I think a critical role of the secondary teacher is to keep the students engaged to ensure that they graduate and have experiences to help them decide what their next steps are.”

Cari says that she loves to travel. These days she is enjoying traveling with her daughter looking at potential colleges and universities for her to attend. She also attended an international roundtable in Nicaragua this past summer that focused on individuals considered at-risk. The trip also included a service project.

After discussing the many changes that have occurred in the field of education over her career, she discussed the concept of inclusion. Cari believes that inclusion has raised expectations for both students and teachers, but leads to some challenges. “There are some areas that are difficult to teach students with disabilities in an inclusion environment,” she said, “such as career exploration and self-determination skills.” Nonetheless, she said that she believes that inclusion has been successful for all involved.

At the close of the discussion, Cari stated, “One of the reasons I have stayed here [at Auburn] as long as I have is because I work with people who have similar interests, but who are also good to work with. I enjoy the collaborative environment. That is hard to find.”
ATLI’S OWN MAKES A TRANSITION...
THERESA CHAN, DOCTORAL CANDIDATE

Story by Kat Cler

A n enthusiastic student, esteemed worker, and motivating peer, Theresa Chan will be greatly missed as she embarks upon her own life transition – she is moving to Seattle to finish the final year of her Counseling Psychology doctoral program! Theresa’s accomplishments and interests are vast. As an Auburn University graduate student, she has been published in journals, presented at conferences, and successfully defended her dissertation. More importantly, she has left an outstanding impression on those who have had the pleasure of knowing her.

Theresa’s passion for assisting others has extended from her professional counseling goals to the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute (ATLI), where she worked as a graduate associate for over two years. Notably, Theresa brought her research and clinical skills to ATLI, reminding us of the importance of mental health within the domains of transition. Specifically, Theresa recognized and spoke with other professionals about multicultural issues existing within the transition process, a special area of interest for her. With the opportunities provided by ATLI, Theresa was able to network with schools, state leaders, and other professionals throughout Alabama. In turn, these experiences broadened her interests and highlighted concerns that were not readily apparent to her prior to her involvement at ATLI.

Theresa has continued to motivate her peers and co-workers in a variety of ways. An avid weight lifter and runner, Theresa challenges others to strive and follow their passions, whatever they may be. When reflecting back on her time at ATLI, her devotion to this message shows. She said, “ATLI helped me so much, both professionally and personally. I hope to use these golden experiences as I embark on my future endeavors!” We know here at ATLI her energy and passion will surely be missed!

Congratulations Theresa, as you embark on your next journey!

~Building Brighter Futures~

CALENDAR OF EVENTS
2017 ALABAMA TRANSITION CONFERENCE
March 6th & 7th | Updates, visit auburn.edu/atli

AUGUST
30 State Interagency Transition Team Meeting

SEPTEMBER
25 – 27 Council of Administrators of Special Education Conference

OCTOBER
Disability Awareness Month
20 – 22 Alabama Assistive Technology Expo & Conference
18 – 23 Division on Career Development and Transition International Conference

NEWSLETTER NOTES
Do you have an interesting personal story to share about the transition process? Our newsletter staff would like to hear from you! Call 334.844.5927.

Archived issues of ATLI Directions are saved at auburn.edu/atli (click on “Resources”).